

WHEN IS ENOUGH, ENOUGH?

Tourism is the largest employer on the island and there is nothing wrong having tourism as the main pillar of our economy. We have reaped the fruits of tourism for over 40 years and we will be able to do so for the next 40 years if we do it well. This can only be achieved if we nurture her, take care of her and ensure that those in tourism have the proper tools to work with. It is a fact that many Arubans do not care for certain jobs in the hotel industry anymore. Think of housemen, room-keepers, beach and pool boys and to some extent service and preparation staff, consequently we will be in need of work permits. As a result of the new projects on the map we will be in need of a substantial amount of work permits. How we go about this will depend on how successful we will be in the coming years.

Our Prime Minister made the comment in the first week of January 2007 that the Council of Ministers had decided upon a moratorium on timeshare and condo units with the exception of those projects already in the pipeline. The first expression that came to my mind was the very Dutch expression "Mosterd na de maaltijd". In English, I would translate this expression into "Too little, too late"! An evaluation of the pending projects in the pipeline shows that they will secure an expansion of our current hotel and time share inventory with an additional 4210 units over the next four years.



In process:

● Expansion Divi Phoenix	150	units
● Expansion Marriott Surf Club	150	units
● Expansion Divi Village	52	units
● Riu	320	units
● Oceania	120	condos
	totaling 792 units	

In the start blocks:

● Westin	154	units
● Expansion Amsterdam Manor	130	units
● Expansion Manchebo	75	units

In the pipe line:

● The Cliff	100	condos
● Gold Coast	300	villas
● Town homes	34	condos
● Sands	270	condos
● Palm Beach Plaza	350	condos
● The Mill resort	200	units
● Bushiri	350	units
● San Nicolaas Development	1100	units
● Andicuri project	80	units
● Condo DOW complex	60	units
● Tierra del Sol	80	condos
● Divi Village	84	units

Total development

4159 units

From the above we may deduct that a moratorium sounds courageous but there are about 4000 hotel, timeshare and condo units that will open their doors in the next few years and this will have serious impact on our country. Despite various reports about carrying capacity our hotel inventory will increase by more than 50 percent in just 4 years. Studies by our Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) show that we have to import labor. CBS in her report for 2006 applied 0.78 employee per hotel room (direct) and 2.27 employees for the tourism industry (indirect). Consequently we may deduct that we will be in need of about 3000 new horeca workers while in total the tourism industry will grow with 9000 employees. Our population will grow from about 103.000 habitants to close to 112,000 habitants in just a few years time. CBS concludes:

- That the "planned expansion" will put the labor force under stress (between 3.6 and 10 thousand new vacancies till 2010).
- Consequently recommends a gradually (instead of simultaneously) rise in the number of rooms.
- Raise participation rates of the population currently living in Aruba.
- Contact and attract locals (studying abroad).
- Streamline the logistical process for work permits.
- Integrate foreigners into our community.

What we see, however, is the contrary and I am seriously worried. Aruban developer Raymond Maduro, who himself was successful in developing 630 timeshare units and a golf course in

an email exchange, concurs with me by saying "ARUBA WILL BE DOOMED BY OVERDEVELOPMENT IN 5 TO 10 YEARS IF NO ONE CHANGES THE DIRECTION". All of this is made worse by our new LTU where this new (and also our current) labor force will be issued work permits for a maximum of 3 years.

With our current inventory and moderate growth as CBS suggests, we have all the ingredients and all we need to do with our tourism, is make it better. Make all aspects of it better! From arrival through immigration, from transportation, to the choice of accommodation, to all the services we provide. We have to ensure a better Product Aruba and we have lots of room for improvement! Attracting quality tourists will mean getting our act together, cleaning up after ourselves, and giving service with a smile. I read the other day that in preparing for the 2008 Olympics, China is teaching the many volunteers that will be the hosts in Beijing to smile. It is not part of the Chinese culture, for no reason to smile at foreigners. Aruba on the other hand is blessed with people that smile as part of our Hospitality and even those that we import have that quality to smile a lot and frequently. Besides our beaches, our climate and the fact that we are outside the hurricane belt, we have the people that are hospitable and friendly. We have to ensure that they will have reasons to continue to smile and we have to work on our product to make her better. The reason many among us believe that our slogan 'One Happy Island' is passé in marketing, is that our island has more to do and we must stand behind our number plates. We are stressed and there are too many obstacles that prevent us of being happy. How can we make others happy, if we fail to be happy ourselves?

In North America we hear many pleas when issues are of a worrisome nature, with the urge to write to your local Congressman. I recommend that we do the same and write to our Members of Parliament to change this course of direction and follow the instructions of the CBS, because when is enough, enough? ☐

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